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ABSTRACT

Despite the diversity in syllabus design and teaching methodologies for English as a second language, and for second language instruction in general, communicative proficiency is the underlying common goal. Some of the most influential ideas supporting this trend come from the fields of sociolinguistics, second language acquisition, and second language instruction. Communicative language teaching (CLT) has developed along two distinct lines. One is in the area of syllabus design, led by creation of the semantic or functional syllabus. This type of syllabus is characterized by more situational information about language use; classroom use of problem-solving, role-playing, community-based activities, and games; assignment of communicative tasks outside the classroom; formal comments about the style, appropriateness, and attitudes conveyed by utterances; and development of materials addressing the needs of special language-learning groups, such as scientists. The other development is in language teaching methodology, with a central concept that language teaching should be task-oriented. This approach also uses the principles that information transfer is important in CLT exercises, that an information gap exists and must be filled, and that assessment must address the question of whether or not the content has been correctly conveyed. (MSE)

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# TESOL and Approaches to the Development of Communicative Proficiency

Richard Light

For some time now diversity has been the name of the game in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages. The diversity has been evident in both syllabus design and in teaching methodologies. Yet within this diversity there has been an implicit underlying commonality. Whether the activities were found in audiolingual methodology, in Community Language Learning, in the Silent Way, in the transformational cognitive approach, or in communicative language teaching, they all implied the common goal of enabling the learner to participate in a meaningful way in the linguistic and cultural activities of English-speaking people. At least implicitly, these approaches were aimed at allowing learners to achieve communicative proficiency. It most often was in the means not the aims that such approaches differed significantly. Our purpose here will be to examine and bring some order to this diversity of activities and materials in TESOL. We will do this by utilizing a number of concepts from the literature which will help put TESOL activities in perspective in terms of their effectiveness in leading learners toward the goal of communicative proficiency. A brief historical note should help us achieve some of this perspective.

Perhaps more than any other language teaching field, we in TESOL seem to enjoy experimenting with new approaches, methods, and techniques in our classrooms. Historically, this also seems to have been the case. To quote a leading British methodologist commenting on the state of the art back in 1899: "Things are altogether unsettled regarding language teaching methods and materials"; he regarded this diversity as a good sign since it gave promise of "the survival of the fittest" (Sweet, 1899/1964). Somewhat later in the 1920s, another leading TESOL methodologist suggested that "if we were to ask a hundred different language teachers to design what each considered an ideal EFL course or textbook, the results would be a hundred different courses, most differing from others in fundamental ways" (Palmer, 1921/1964). Forty years later, in 1965, another leading methodologist listed fifteen "most common" language teaching methods in use, including those methods labeled Direct, Natural, Psychological, Phonetic, Reading, Grammar, Translation,

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Grammar-Translation, Eclectic, Unit, Language Control, Mimicry-Memorization, Practice-Theory, Cognate, and Dual Language (Mackey, 1965). Although in a state of the art report just a few years ago it was suggested that "there is less uncertainty today regarding the state of the art in TESOL arising from the ferment in linguistics, psychology and pedagogy" (Paulston, 1975), others continue to see the diversity noted by Sweet back in 1899. Lado (1981), for example, noted that the challenge to the applied linguistics model of the 1940s and 1950s by the Chomskyian revolution in linguistics left a theoretical void which produced, as Lado put it, the "plethora of methodological proposals in the 1970s." In addition, the challenges to "standard" audiolingual and cognitive-code language teaching methodologies by (among others) Community Language Learning (Curran, 1976), by the Silent Way (Gattegno, 1976), by applications of values clarification to second language teaching (Moskowitz, 1978), and by leading British advocates of communicative approaches such as Brumfit (1979) and Johnson (1982), have all contributed to the diversity of second language teaching activities now current in TESOL classrooms.

To further illustrate this diversity we might suggest a list of currently prevalent activities and ideas. The list is almost open ended but might include at least the following: audiolingual approach, counseling-learning approach, strip story, Silent Way, conversation circle, values clarification, Islamabad technique, sentence combining, communicative approach, language experience approach, information gap, natural approach, task dependency, Greek Machine exercise, cuisinaire rods, the human computer technique, and so forth. Of course we could go on and you could make up your own list of activities and ideas current in TESOL. In order to assist us in achieving perspectives on these activities and to assist us in making sense of what Altman (1981) has called "an era of curricular and pedagogical overchoice" in TESOL, it should help to examine the activities through some categories related to second language teaching and to the development of communicative proficiency. The set of categories which follows is not exhaustive, but rather is intended to be suggestive of some perspectives which might prove helpful in discussing TESOL activities which aim at developing communicative proficiency.

One useful set of such categories worth recalling was first proposed by Anthony (1963). He suggested that we look at language teaching activities and the principles underlying them in terms of a hierarchical framework involving the categories approach, method, and technique. Approach, he suggested, is axiomatic, representing a set of beliefs about the nature of learning and the nature of language. Approach states a point of view, a philosophy--something one believes but cannot necessarily prove. Applying this to our list of activities in second language teaching we would suggest that the natural approach, counseling-learning, Silent Way, transformational-cognitive, and audiolingual are approaches rooted respectively in beliefs regarding the relative importance of second language acquisition theory, humanism, a personal philosophy, cognitivism, and behaviorism in explaining facts about learning. These approaches are discussed in detail in Krashen and Terrell (1983), Curran (1976), Gattegno (1976), Stevick (1971) and Lado (1964). The "pure" communicative approach, now receiving such wide attention, draws insight from research on second language acquisition, from sociolinguistics, and from functional syllabus design theory (Yalden, 1983). While approach is axiomatic in Anthony's hierarchy, the next concept--method--is procedural, and is consistent with the approach; it is an overall plan for teaching based on a given approach. Within this framework, community language learning is a method consistent with the counseling-learning approach. Krashen and Terrell's (1983) "natural method" would be included under the natural approach and Johnson's (1982) communicative methodology would be included under the communicative approach. The use of the mimicry-memorization method is one generally associated with an audiolingual approach to second language teaching and behaviorist views of learning. Following method in Anthony's scheme of analysis is the most specific category, that of technique. A technique is implementational and is consistent with a method. It is what actually takes place in the classroom in terms of actions and technologies to accomplish immediate objectives. From our list then we would include under technique the information gap and task dependency usually associated with a communicative approach, the conversation circle usually associated with community language learning, and the use of cuisinaire rods in the Silent Way. The concepts of approach, method and technique then do provide us with one useful set of

lenses through which to view the diversity of ideas current in second language teaching.

Another set of concepts, perhaps somewhat less clearly definable, is that of learner-centered activities and teacher-centered activities in the language classroom. It is a commonplace for us now to discuss learner-centered instruction, but Louis Kelly in his comprehensive book Twenty-Five Centuries of Language Teaching does not discuss the distinction at all and he certainly does not discuss communicative language teaching. One is tempted to draw the conclusion that for 2,500 years, from 500 B.C. to 1969 (the date of Kelly's book), teacher-centered activities dominated the second language classrooms of the world. This may still be a true picture of most classrooms in the world, yet in ESL in this country at any rate, the learner-centered classroom is receiving more attention, especially in approaches such as counseling-learning and its application in community language learning, as well as in the communicative approach. So the notions of learner-centered and teacher-centered classes (though necessarily somewhat loosely defined) nonetheless are useful in helping us sort our characteristics of the items on our list. They prove helpful, for example, in attempting to answer questions such as which of the approaches, methods, and techniques currently available allow for one or the other emphasis in the classroom. The "human computer" technique noted above, for example, allows the learner to control pattern practice activities in the classroom by indicating to the teacher which sentences he wants modeled for practice.

In making choices about activities which allow for nontraditional, learner-centered communicative activities in the classroom, we must of course keep in mind learner expectations regarding appropriate classroom roles for teachers and learners. Although one may adopt what Allwright (1980) has labeled the "cheerful steamroller" attitude in overcoming student hesitations about unfamiliar learner-centered activities, we discovered in a recent Fulbright Program at Peking University that introduction of some non-traditional learner-centered techniques in traditional teacher-centered settings may result in only qualified success as measured by learner reactions to such techniques (Light, 1981). That is, learners were responsive to "small group activities" when presented as part of a coherent approach such as

community language learning but less receptive to small group work in isolation from such an approach.

Another set of concepts that we found useful in applying to our list was that of skill-getting and skill-using, two terms discussed at some length by Rivers and Temperley (1978). Skill-getting has traditionally involved teacher-directed activities such as repetition drills, pattern drills and dialogue recitation. Skill-using on the other hand involved student-initiated language exchanges for real communicative purposes. These concepts do help in making sense of our list, but like the others must be applied with caution. For example, one might assume that the skill-getting takes place primarily in a teacher-centered, teacher-directed atmosphere, while skill-using happens some time later, mainly in a student-centered atmosphere with student-initiated language use. However, this is a somewhat oversimplified view, as we discover when we examine our list through these two lenses. For example, in a conversation circle technique, which involves student-initiated but teacher-assisted language use, skill-getting and skill-using are closely intertwined. In this technique the student uses the target language immediately for real communication, but skill-getting takes place almost simultaneously as the teacher assists by modeling the language the student has chosen. Thus this student-centered conversation circle technique allows for both skill-getting and skill-using to proceed hand in hand.

We used the phrase "real communicative purposes" above. If there is one current trend in second language teaching upon which virtually all TESOL specialists appear to agree it is the need for learners to use English for "real communication" both in the classroom and outside it in order to achieve communicative proficiency. It may be labeled "real" (as distinguished from "realistic") language use (Stevick, 1971), it may be language used to discuss "real reality" as distinguished from "simulated reality" (Taylor, 1982) or it may be "communicative" activities ad distinguished from mechanical or meaningful activities (Paulston & Bruder, 1976), but all agree it is crucial to allowing learners to develop their communicative proficiency. One useful set of terms for putting "communicative" activities into perspective was developed by Paulston and Bruder (1976) who suggest a distinction among mechanical, meaningful and communicative activities. Mechanical activities or

drill are those which can be done by students without necessarily understanding the language they are using in the drill. Included here are repetition drills and your everyday garden variety substitution drills using verbal cues. Students may "successfully" participate in these drills without understanding them. Meaningful drills on the other hand are those requiring at least partial understanding in order to successfully do the drills, as when visual cues are used requiring the student to link language with pictures or realia during the drills. Communicative activities as defined by Paulston and Bruder, require students to use the target language to exchange new information, including stating facts, predictions, opinions, and so forth; the sort of things we normally use language for. Note, however, that as Paulston and Bruder observe, their communicative activities in that sense are still drills since the teacher controls the activity. Paying attention to this set of categories enables us to focus on the relative importance of these types of activities in a given ESOL classroom or lesson. Some methodologies call for a relatively minor role for communicative activities. Paulston and Bruder's (1976) eight-step model for a grammar lesson, for example, includes a communicative activity as the eighth and last step, following such traditional steps as "presenting the dialogue," "asking comprehension questions," "giving grammatical explanations" and doing mechanical and then meaningful drills.

Others have called for a reversal of this practice-first and communicate-later format. It has been suggested that an ESOL program "should be based on content and real issues" (Taylor, 1982); that we should "adopt a communicative orientation" to the teaching of ESOL (Widdowson, 1978) and that we should be "reorienting language teaching toward communication, not just because the eventual aim is communication but because communication practice can be expected to develop linguistic skills" (Allwright, 1979). But whatever part we choose to have communicative activities play in our classrooms, the three-way distinction among mechanical, meaningful and communicative activities is a useful one for us to consider as we examine our teaching.

Related to this distinction and to increased interest in communicative use of language in the classroom are the concepts of real and realistic use of language suggested by Stevick (1971) and Taylor's (1982) analogous use of the terms "simulated reality" and "real reality." "Realistic" language use or

"simulated reality" involves such classroom activities as discussion of pictured situations, role plays, and many traditional audiolingual activities. "Real" language use or "real reality" in the classroom, on the other hand, involves focus on discussion of real issues and real-life situations, and includes opportunities for students to do such things as describe events, express opinions, or accomplish specific tasks. A number of specific activities involving this kind of language use have been suggested by Rivers (1983). These include eliciting student reactions to a slide show or television show, problem solving, displaying one's achievements, and giving opinions.

Support for this emphasis upon communication has come not only from informed opinion in the literature but also from an extensive review of the research on second language learning. Carroll (1974), after reviewing some one hundred thirty research studies on second language learning and teaching concluded among other things that instruction should be "as meaningful as possible" and should "come alive in meaningful communication situations" (p. 143). Given this current well-reasoned emphasis on communication in the classroom, the distinction between real and realistic, or simulated reality and real reality, by whatever label, would appear to be a helpful one to add to our set of categories for sorting out language classroom activities. Providing for a focus on real language use are such activities in our initial list as the conversation circle, values clarification activities, and the exotic-sounding Islamabad technique, actually a student-originated, teacher-directed language activity using cuisinaire rods in a counseling-learning atmosphere, first discussed by Stevick (1980).

Since it illustrates aspects of both the Silent Way and counseling-learning, the Islamabad technique is worth describing here. In this technique a student describes a city or other place no one else in the class has ever seen, representing each sentence with a cuisinaire rod. The teacher then retells the description asking the student for help where needed. The rest of the class watches and listens, the concreteness of the rods providing a visual focus for their concentration and their imagination. The teacher's retelling serves to allow the learners to hear the description again in a natural, native voice. Other students then take turns pointing to the rods and telling

things they remember from the account. Finally, the other students ask the originator questions about the city or other place he has described. As Stevick (1980) notes, this technique promotes communication and allows people "to do something together." The originator has contributed "real" facts; the teacher has contributed guidance, a non-judgmental counseling attitude, and whatever words the originator needed. The student-generated language that comes out of this technique (as with language coming out of other techniques) can be fed into many other activities. It can be recorded on tape, transcribed by students or teacher, written on a handout for discussion at the next class session, used as material for dictation, used as the basis for grammatical exercises, and so forth. So this is one of the several techniques on our list which allows for a focus on communication, may be considered learner-centered, and reverses the traditional lesson format of practice first, communicate later.

Another helpful distinction to consider is that between language use in teaching settings and language use in non-teaching settings. As suggested by Fanselow (1978, and forthcoming) the distinction encourages us to describe and compare the patterns of communication in the two settings and to determine the extent to which the purposes for which we have students use language in the classroom are congruent with purposes for which they will use language outside of the classroom. Utilizing a coding system to classify purposes (structuring, soliciting, reacting and responding) and sources (teacher or student) in the classroom setting and in other settings, Fanselow found that there was indeed incongruence between purposes used in the two types of settings. (Soliciting and responding accounted for two-thirds of the communications in teaching settings while reacting accounted for two-thirds of the communication in non-teaching settings.) Fanselow suggested several activities which help to restore congruity between in-class and out-of-class purposes for language use, and also maintain the focus on communication we have been discussing as a major trend in TESOL. His suggestions include providing an opportunity for students to teach a class about some topic on which they are informed; having students interviewing other students to elicit opinions about a relevant topic; communicating in small groups to accomplish some assigned task; having students assume the role of observer and reporter of some activity in or

outside of the class. As with other techniques, follow-up activities involving recording and further use of students' language generated in these activities would allow communication to remain the initial focus of the lesson, with various types of practice activities introduced later. Further elaboration upon activities for second language learners in non-teaching settings is provided by LoCastro and Laporte (1981) who discuss "non-classroom learning environments" as opportunities for changing traditional TESOL interaction patterns. Community-based tasks such as obtaining information about specific merchandise and prices in a particular store, locating a particular place by asking questions in the target community, and taking field trips to student-suggested areas of interest with specific pre- and post-trip language activities are all suggested as complementary to a regular ESL classroom.

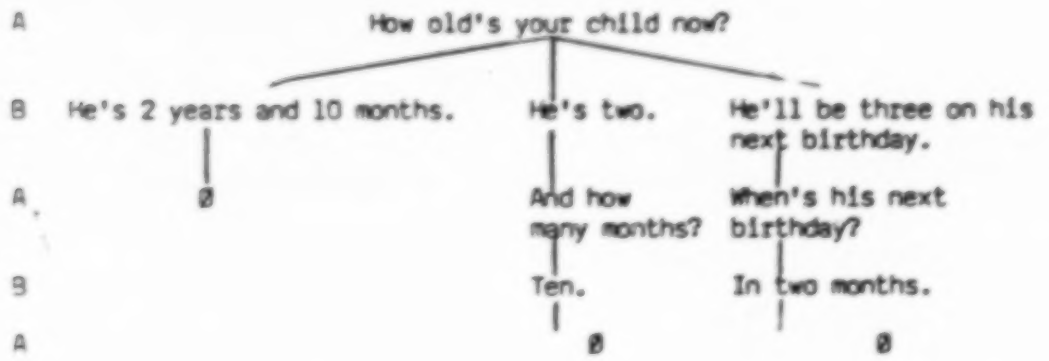
What we have said thus far, and what the title of this conference suggests, is that communicative language teaching is a trend in second language teaching that is powerful and perhaps relatively (as such things go in language teaching) permanent. Thus it would seem worthwhile to explore briefly some developments leading to this trend. Among the most influential ideas supporting this trend are those coming from the sociolinguistic tradition (e.g., Hymes, 1979), from the study of second language acquisition (e.g., Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1981) among others, and from language teachers themselves, such as Leonard Newmark (1979). One of the earliest and most persuasive arguments for the need to rethink the language activities in vogue during the heyday of ALM was that made by Newmark in "How Not to Interfere with Language Learning." In this early reaction against audiolingualism, Newmark's most telling observation concerns the nature of ordinary everyday language use and how far removed from this was ALM orthodoxy. As he expressed it, a student may know:

> the structure that the linguist teaches, (yet) cannot know that the way to get his cigarette lit by a stranger when he has no matches is to walk up to him and say one or utterances "Do you have a light?" or "Got a match?" (not one of the equally well-formed questions, "Do you have a fire?", or "Do you have illumination?" or "Are you a match's owner?").

In other words, as many have been observing ever since, it is one thing to learn language patterns in the classroom and quite another to use them effectively and appropriately to get things done in the real world outside the classroom. Response to this problem of teaching appropriate language use for communicative purposes has been the development of what has come to be called communicative language teaching (CLT).

In attempting to meet this challenge, CLT has developed along two quite distinct lines. One set of developments has taken place in the area of syllabus design, led by the works of Van Ek (1975) and others which have led to the semantic or functional syllabus. The other major set of developments connected with CLT has been in language teaching methodology, led by such specialists as Allwright (1979), Rivers (1983), and Johnson (1982).

Central to one view of CLT is the suggestion that language teaching should be "task oriented." The following view of interactions between speakers has been advanced by Johnson (1982) to support emphasis on communicative activities in the classroom.




A's aim is to find out B's child's age in years and months; that is the purpose of the communication. What is outlined are possible sequences of interactions. There are at least three processes which A must undertake if he is to achieve his purposes. 1) He must compare the information given with his internal purpose; 2) he must identify any mismatch and act to reduce the mismatch and 3) formulate a response. These three processes must occur quickly and the ability to achieve this results in what we call fluency. The teaching of fluency thus must involve practice in these processes.

The central implication of the nature of these communicative processes is that they can be effectively practiced in a language teaching setting which is "task oriented." We must, according to this view, provide learners with a purpose for evaluating incoming information. This then is one central characteristic of communicative language teaching--that there be a task dependency involved in the classroom activity. An example of such a characteristic in action is provided by Johnson (1982). According to this view, we create whenever possible a Task 2 which can only be done if Task 1 has been successfully completed. An example is provided by the Greek Machine Exercise (Johnson, 1981). Instructions for this activity are as follows:

> Many inventions were made in the ancient world. Students work in pairs. Student A looks at the diagram of an Egyptian invention on page 107. Student B looks at the diagram of a Greek machine on page 105. Each student writes a description of their machine. Then they exchange descriptions and each must draw a diagram of the other's machine. If the diagram is wrong, student makes description clearer, so the diagram is correct. (Johnson, 1981)

This particular activity is designed primarily for advanced students, but it exemplifies a productive sequence which may be used at a variety of levels.

In addition to illustrating task dependency, this sequence involves several other "principles" which Johnson (1982) considers appropriate for a communictive language classroom. These are as follows:

Information Transfer Principle. Since a central characteristic of CLT is that it focuses attention on the ability to understand and convey information, the concept of information transfer is an important one in CLT exercises. An example of such an exercise is the following:

> Look at the following two letters. They contain information about the two people who want to join the Albany Country Club. Fill in the application forms based on the letters:

A similar exercise could be done for practicing listening comporehension with the initial information given via taped dialogues. (A modification of this technique, utilizing videotaped dialogues might be used to inform

learners about how Americans signal moods or functions via verbal and non-verbal cues.)

The Information Gap Principle. Activities in which this principle operates must include what has been called a "native receiver"--that is a person who does not initially possess the information needed to successfully complete an activity and who receives it by means of spoken or written communication. In the Greek Machine exercise noted above, this occurs when a pair of students exchange their written descriptions of different diagrams, and on the basis of these descriptions draw a previously unknown diagram.

The Correction for Content Principle. This suggests that just as communicative practice of productive skills should deal with the conveying of information, so communicative correction of production skills should assess whether information content has been correctly conveyed. This is again exemplified in the Greek Machine exercise. Students are writing their descriptions for each other knowing that their written work will be assessed initially not for grammatical correctness by the teacher, but rather for communictive adequacy by their partner in production of a diagram. That is, it is initially being regarded as a product of use rather than usage. Thus in the Greek Machine exercise, students receive feedback on the communicative effectiveness of their written work. (This principle does not negate the utility of teacher correction for grammatical accuracy at some other stage.)

Syllabus design is the second aspect of language teaching to be affected by the emphasis on communicative language teaching. A syllabus in its simplest form may be considered a list of items to teach and some order in which they are to be taught. In a syllabus which is responsive to the concerns of a communicative classroom the organization is often around language functions, or "uses to which the language may be put." The current popularity in TESOL of the functional syllabus, with its emphasis upon getting things done with language, can in large measure be traced to such educators as Newmark, noted earlier. Such observers noted that the structurally-based syllabus of ALM and cognitive-code methodology were less than adequate to enable learners to perform appropriately to get things done with language. In addition, such structural syllabi often took inadequate note of the social settings in which language operates, and thus left learners inadequately prepared to use language appropriately.

Publishers of ESOL textbooks in the United States and abroad have responded to these suggestions with a variety of books designed to focus upon communicative use of language. They have often done this by highlighting the terms functional or communicative in the title of the text, by selecting and organizing items to be taught in terms of functions rather than grammar, by providing sociolinguistic information for language activities, and by providing ample suggestions and opportunities for communicative activities. At the same time, many textbook writers have seemed reluctant to give up traditional activities entirely. Thus we still find language drills, grammar study, and utilization of dialogues in many texts which claim a functional or communicative approach to language teaching. Indeed one publisher has hedged bets so carefully that one of their texts includes all three syllabus types in its title--the subtitle reads "Grammar, Function and Setting."

In spite of this mixing of approaches to syllabus design, we see in many recent EFL texts a greater emphasis upon functional units and communicative activities than was evident several years ago. The following features characterize a number of the texts recently available:

- more information is provided about the situation in which language is used, including characteristics of the physical setting (restaurant, train station, etc.); on the roles and status of participants in the text; on mood, and attitudes expressed via intonation and vocabulary.

- problem-solving, role plays, community-based activities, and games are often an integral part of the text.

- provision is often made for communicative tasks to be assigned outside the classroom.

- formal comments are frequently available regarding style, appropriateness and attitudes conveyed by utterances.

- attempts have been made to develop materials responding to the special needs of specific groups of learners such as scientists.

To summarize: It seems clear that although the common goal implicit in most TESOL methodologies and materials is the development of communicative proficiency in ESL learners, there remains considerable diversity in activities currently utilized to achieve that goal. It seems just as clear that there is a strong contemporary trend toward activities and materials with

more explicit emphasis upon teaching aspects of communicative use of languages. Developments in sociolinguistics, in syllabus design theory, in communication theory, and in pedagogy are likely to continue to provide the impetus for this emphasis upon communication in second language teaching. It seems just as likely that even as background knowledge is expanded, and as teaching activities are refined, the diversity of methods and materials in TESOL will continue to enliven our classrooms.

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